

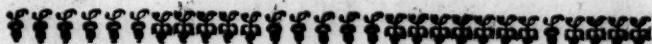
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A

LETTER

To the Reverend
Dr. *WATERLAND, &c.*



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A

LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. WATERLAND,

CONCERNING THE

Nature and Value of *Sincerity*:

WITH SOME

REMARKS

On his Treatment of it,

IN A LATE

TREATISE,

ENTITLED,

*The Importance of the Doctrine of
the HOLY TRINITY asserted.*

Phillips Oliver.

LONDON:

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MDCCXXXIV.

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A
LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. WATERLAND.

SIR,

YOUR late Representation of the great Importance of believing certain Principles, which you profess in your own way, will at least justify me in offering you some Considerations upon a Principle that I take to be full as important as any; and which you have not yet thought fit to admit among your weighty *Doctrines*; but rather to treat in a very careless and contemptuous, not to say ludicrous and immoral manner. I mean the Doctrine of *Sincerity*, or in other Words, that *Integrity of Heart* which I ever took to be the *Glory* of a Man, what-

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ever Opinions he might entertain, or whatever Religion he might profess.

I must own there are many things in this Treatise of yours that I can by no means assent to, which nevertheless I am but little concern'd about, and freely leave to those whose Interests and Circumstances expose them to the dreadful Consequences of differing from you in your very important Points. I should hope indeed that the *Force of Reason*, the express meaning of *Scripture*, the *Sense of the primitive Church*, the *Opinion of the wisest and best Men*, but above all the *Authority and Powers of the Church*, were not, as you say, all levelled at the Destruction of those unfortunate People who see not these Things in *your Light*, and cannot profess, to a Point, your Measure of *Orthodoxy*. Nevertheless I wish they may be able to stand all the Artillery of *Fathers, Councils, Creeds, and Churches* you have brought against them: But for my self, who do not see the Force of your Reasonings at all, and have been used to judge for my self, and not to fear the Censures of Authority,

thority, especially where the Powers are small, and under reasonable civil Restraints; and above all, since I am persuaded that at the bottom, my Security will be found to be in my *Integrity* alone; for my self, I say, I am very easy about all the *Anathemas* you have uttered against *Hereticks*; and only concerned at your Treatment of that Principle, which I apprehend to be the only solid Dependance, in *their* Power, of all honest Men. Give me leave therefore to expostulate a little with you upon some Notions you have advanced on this Head.

I will, in the first Place, freely and at large, explain to you my Notion of *Sincerity*, and give you my Reasons for supposing it to be that *Disposition* or *moral Virtue* which alone can recommend us to the *Favour of God*, under any Circumstance and Profession. This, I reckon, will be proceeding fairly, and make the Observations that I shall afterwards offer you, appear more *evident* and *just*.

The *first*, most *necessary* and *general* Notion which I include in my Idea of

Sincerity or Integrity of Heart is, that it is an Action of the Mind, as all moral Virtues must necessarily be. I mean this in Contradistinction to any natural or particular Capacity or Perfection; which is properly the Gift of God. I know very well, there is a loose and unphilosophical way of attributing some Actions of Men, and especially moral Virtues, to the Grace of God: Which if it mean only the Favour and Assistance of God, ordinary or extraordinary, attending our Endeavours, is a very just and useful Sense of the Word; but as it is commonly, with great Superstition and Ignorance, used to signify moral Virtues, is very absurd. Because whatever Favour and Assistance we may at any time, or in any manner, receive from God; that Favour and Assistance is plainly God's Action only, and can, in no proper Sense, be said to be any Action of ours, much less a moral Virtue in us.

All that can be consider'd in any Being, are its natural Capacities, and its Actions. Under the former, I include all the Powers which it has by its Nature, or which

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it any ways *acquires*. These indeed contain its very power of *Agency*, if it have that Power, tho' not its *Actions*; which, with their Natures and Qualifications, come under the other Head. These also include all its acquired Capacities, whether they be the Result of its own Endeavours, or the Favours and Helps of other Beings, and of God himself: All which may be consider'd together as so many *natural Powers*, Capacities or Perfections of any Being in any Circumstance. I call them *natural Capacities* in Opposition to *moral Virtues*, because they are the Gifts or Permissions of God, in their original Creation, or after Direction, according to the Relations in which they stand; and constitute the several Perfections or Capacities of their Natures.

That which is further to be consider'd in any Being are its *Actions*. These are very *distinct* from all its *natural Perfections*, for altho' *Agency* itself is a *natural Perfection*; yet the *Action* of an Agent is a consideration very *different* from its *Agency*, and properly *belongs* to the Being, whose

whose Action it is, as of its own Production. I must also observe, that this *Action* of any Being must be carefully distinguished from the *Effects* of it, be they *natural* or *necessary*; the free appointed Order of the Will of God, or the necessary Consequence of such Action^a. It is, strictly speaking, the *free Exertion* of the Mind upon some Motive, and towards some End; and the *Nature* of the Action is not altered by any *Mistake* of the Mind concerning the *Motive* or *End* or *Effect* of it. If therefore we examine the Operations and Ideas of our own Minds, we shall find that this Notion of the *Action* of any Being is distinct from any of its *natural Capacities*, as well as from any particular *Motives* or *Effects* of it; and that it is a certain *Exertion* of the Mind in some Circumstances of Intention, that the Mind is conscious of in the *Instant* of that *Exertion*. This is my *Idea* of an *Action*, and of the way of considering the *Nature* and *Kind*

^a See this proved at large in a late very excellent and judicious Enquiry into the *Nature of the human Soul*, Pages 55 and on, 91 and on, 139 and on, and many other Places.

of it; and that which I am persuaded every Man will find also to be his own, upon an abstract and careful Consultation of his own Judgment: And I have been the more particular in describing it, because I think upon a clear Notion of this, the thorough understanding of most moral Discourses depends ; and because it is necessary in order to apprehend rightly what I have further to say on the Subject before us.

The present Enquiry does not relate to any *natural Perfections* or *Qualifications* of any Being ; but to their *moral Virtues* only : For *moral Virtues* being the only Qualifications in any Beings that can possibly recommend them to the *Favour* of God ; and *Actions* alone depending upon the *Agents themselves* ; every thing else relating to any Being, intirely depending upon God or upon some other Being appointed or permitted to produce it ; it follows necessarily, that *moral Virtues* must, in some way or other, consist in *Action*. Nothing can be more evident than that *natural Excellency* and *Perfections* can never be the Things

Things that recommend to the Favour or *Approbation* of any intelligent Being; because they are *naturally* in that Being who *possesses* them, independent of its *Will* or *Choice*: for however *useful* and worthy of some sort of *Esteem* the *natural Qualifications* may be for the Purposes they are fit to serve under the Direction of those Beings who have them, or of those to whom they are subject; it is very plain that there is no *proper Virtue* in *possessing* them, or any just *Approbation* attending them: But that which we *properly esteem* and *approve* in any Beings, are their *Actions* and *Intentions*. The *Esteem* of the former only supposes that Beings *have* these *Qualifications* and *Capacities*; that of the latter supposes these *Capacities rightly applied*. This makes the Distinction very evident. Now what is it that renders *them* worthy of such *Approbation*? This is what we are next to enquire.

It is evident that *mere Action*, considered without any *Design* or *Intention* of the Mind, if any such can be, has no *moral Good* or *Evil* in it; cannot deserve *Appro-*

Approbation or Condemnation. The Intention of the Agent in any Action seems to be essential, and consider'd as an End or Motive is that only which can justly denominate it morally good or Evil. The Enquiry therefore must be, what Design or Intention in the Mind of any Agent it is that can render an Action morally good? This I shall venture to assert is only the Design and Intention of acting conformably to that Persuasion the Mind has of the Truth, Goodness, Reasonableness or Obligation of the Action. I see not that any Agent can be capable of designing any thing besides Pleasure or Reasonableness in what he does. The former Intention will not be thought by any, in all Instances, to be morally good, whatever general Principles of that sort some may have advanced. I think that Pleasure, consider'd in it self merely as an End of Action, can never properly and strictly render the Action morally good; altho' when Pleasure is reasonably to be had, it is then always reasonable and morally fit to intend it. But thus it comes under the other Motive that I as-

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sign'd, if it may be properly so called, and is in my Opinion the *only Intention* of the Agent that can make his Action *good* or *praise-worthy*. Thus Agents that seem to be capable only of designing *Pleasure*, without respect to the *Reasonableness* of it, I cannot suppose to be *moral Agents*, or *accountable* for their Actions: And all those who have in any Degree a *Judgment* of *right* and *wrong*, *reasonable* or *unreasonable*, are so far, in my Opinion, *moral Agents*. But let this Criterion of Virtue be ever so differently entertained by careful Inquirers into moral Principles; it will nevertheless, I believe, be allowed by all, that the *Persuasion* of the Agent concerning *right* and *wrong*, *reasonable* and *unreasonable*, whatever may be the *Foundation* of that Judgment, can alone be *his rule of Action*, in *Conformity* or *Contradiction* to which *his particular Actions* will *justly* be accounted *Good* or *Evil*.

Now every one is ready to allow all this to be true, with respect, say they, to *Actions*; which cannot be justified but by their Agreement with our *present Persuasions.*

sions. And thus they allow that even an *erroneous Conscience obliges.* The Truth is, that the present Persuasion of the Mind must necessarily be the Rule of Action ; for it is plainly *immoral* to do what the Conscience condemns : And Contraries cannot possibly oblige. But then, wherein lies the *Guilt of Error?* And what Obligations are we under to receive *Truth?* And wherein consists the *Virtue* of a Man's *Principles?* Here seems to lie all the *Mistake* as well as all the *Difficulty* upon this Subject. Difficulties and Mistakes generally go together : For it is want of Light and Knowledge about any Truth that directly leads to both. I will therefore add one word more to this Purpose : And herein will appear, by the way, the Use and Propriety of your Distinction of *Sincerity* as opposed to *Partiality* and *Prejudice.*

Principles of the Mind, when consider'd as *moral Virtues*, can only relate to *Actions*, as all Virtue necessarily must. This has been before made out. Besides, it is plain, there is nothing else in our Powers.

All natural Endowments and Advantages are the *Gifts* of God, or of some other Beings; even those which seem to be the Consequences of our Actions ². These Effects are all the appointed or permitted Will of God; not at all in our Powers. The *Actions themselves* only are left to us, and by the *End* or *Design* of them only can we show our Regard or Disregard to *Truth* and *Reason*. It is plain therefore that *Principles*, so far as they are the necessary Effect of *Evidence*, can be no *Virtues* at all: The Assent of the Mind to *Truth* it perceives being *natural* or *necessary*, and independent of the Will. Wherein then can consist the *Virtue* of our *Principles*? certainly in some sort of *Action*. In short, I cannot see that it can consist in any thing but in that Degree of *Impartiality*, *Sincerity*, or *Love of Truth*, all which are proper *Actions* of the Mind, with which they are sought after and receiv'd. These are as plainly *Actions* as any other; and the *Virtue* of our *Principles* will ever be in the Proportion of this *Integrity*, what-

² See as before *Enquiry*, &c.

ever the Principles themselves are. Who-ever fixes on any Principles, the *Reception* of which in it self is to be accounted *Virtue*, must show either, that such *Persuasion* is necessarily connected with a sincere Enquiry, (which I fancy will be extreamly hard to make out concerning any Truth) and then this *Sincerity* in the Love of Truth will *include it*, and amount to the same thing; or else he must show that there is something *besides Sincerity* in the Love of Truth that is *morally good*, and that attends the *Reception* of certain Principles; which I think will be a much harder Task. Now if any think that there is some Difficulty in knowing his own *Integrity* in this Love of Truth, or more than in knowing his *Honesty* in the Practice of any other moral Virtue; it seems to me a mere *Delusion* and *Mistake*. For it is evident that I must necessarily be as *conscious* whether I *love Truth*, and have no Bias or Inclination in my Searches after it, as whether I do what I take to be *reasonable*, and am determin'd in my Action by no Lust or Passion contrary to my Reason.

son. In both Cases the Nature of Virtue and Vice plainly appears; and to pretend to doubt of my own Sincerity in either, gives too violent a Suspicion that I feel I want it.

The Objections against this way of thinking concerning the *moral Virtue of Principles* (which however has not been justly and fully consider'd) are, that here no Difference is made between *Truth* and *Error*; no *Obligations* suppos'd to arise from the *real Natures of things*, but only from the *particular Apprehensions* of the Agent; no *Advantages* allow'd to the *Profession* of any, the most *important, Doctrines*; and all *Promises* or *Denunciations*, made to Believers and Unbelievers in Articles of the highest Importance, are hereby render'd *vain and useless*. To all this I shall answer very shortly, after having first examin'd a little into the true Meaning of the word *Importance*, when applied to any *Persuasions* or *Principles* of the Mind. This I shall the rather do, as it will best show the Weight of a great deal that you have advanced, and shorten my Observations on it.

Importance

Importance then, with respect to *Principles* can, I think, only mean that *Pleasure* or *Happiness* which attends our *Persuasion* of them; and this Happiness must either result from the *Nature* of these *Principles*, or from the *Favour* of God bestowed upon those who receive them. The former can only be had by getting a *Persuasion* of these *Principles*, and this only by receiving and attending to the *Evidences* that prove them. This *Reception* and *Attention* of the Mind is, you see, included in my Notion of *Integrity*, and the *Persuasion* is necessary in Proportion to the Evidence that appears: Only let me observe, that any *Influence* which arises from the supposed *Happiness* of believing, or *Misery* of disbelieving, is not *Evidence*, but *Partiality*; and therefore ought to be separated from the Mind in judging; and however *crafty* it may be to apply first to Mens *Hopes* and *Fears*, in order to obtain their *Profession*, it is not *Honesty* and *Love* of *Truth* that works this way, nor as I shall afterwards observe, was any thing of this kind ever meant by insisting upon *Faith* in the Christian Religion.

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The latter, the *Favour of God*, can only be procured by the *Practice of Virtue* in some Sense or other, and therefore does alone follow that *Virtue* which attends any *Persuasion*. Whatever *Favour* God may freely bestow, he cannot be thought to confer *Happiness* upon Men, for any thing *in them*, but *moral Virtue*; and this *Virtue*, in the Case before us, of believing certain *Principles*, can only consist in that *Integrity* which I have been describing.

But farther, whatever *Advantage* or *Importance* the *Belief* of any *Principles* can possibly any way be of to those who receive them, the best and most likely means of coming to the Knowledge of them, if they are *true*, is the Practice of *Integrity* in the *Search* and *Love of Truth*. And I must suppose you are not pleading for any *Principles*, but so far only as they are *true*; nor for the *Profession* only, but the real *Belief* of these *important Doctrines*.

Now, in Answer to the Objection that is made to this way of thinking concerning the *Virtue of Principles*, as before stated;

stated; I say first, that Truth and Error stand thus on their proper and only Foundation. All the Difference that is between them is, that one has *real Evidence* to support it, the other none; and the only way to get at this Evidence is the Exercise of this Integrity of Heart in our Searches after it. Again, all Obligation arises, not only from the *real Natures* of Things, but from the *Apprehension* of the Mind concerning them; or more strictly speaking, it does arise from the *real and true Natures of Things*, which *true Natures of Things* comprehend the *Apprehension* of the Agent especially. For it is impossible that any *unknown Truth*, can, *while unknown*, oblige. This Mistake of supposing Men obliged by Truths *unknown*, is very common; but it is a very different and distinct thing, to be obliged to *know* any Truth, and to be obliged to *conform* to it in Action. These Obligations cannot take place together and at the same time. The former, *to know any Truth*, is properly and only to be *ready* and *careful* to receive it; the other is consequently obligatory, and

supposes the Mind informed. Therefore it is absurd to confound them. Again, whatever *Advantage* it is of to profess any Doctrine, supposing it an *honest* Profession; it has been already said wherein this Advantage lies, and which is the only possible way of attaining it: And in the last place, it is plainly no help to the Evidence of any Truth as such, to propose any Happiness or Misery as attending the Belief or Disbelief of it. These may draw Men in Proportion (not to their Integrity, but) to their *Corruption* into the *Profession* of it, but cannot possibly add to its *Evidence*. Therefore, when *Rewards* are annexed only to *Integrity* of Heart, in which Men cannot deceive either God or themselves; or when they are proposed as *consequent* on that *Sincerity* and *Uprightness*, which will ever receive the Truth as its Evidence appears, which I take to be the Nature of *Christian Rewards*; there is no Danger in the Influence they may have upon any Actions or Professions: But when Principles and Doctrines are insisted on as necessary to be believed upon pain

of *Damnation*, without any regard had to that *Sincerity of Heart*, which is alone the *moral Virtue* that can attend any Persuasion, it looks as if Men were more concerned for their own *Opinions* than for *Truth*; and as if they thought the bare *Profession* of any Principles without Enquiry, or perhaps *against Conviction*, both which are plainly vicious and abominable in the sight of God, were necessary to Men's *Salvation*, which *Salvation* nevertheless is *absurdly supposed* to be the *Gift* of this God of *Truth*.

I think there needs little more to be said to vindicate any *true Revelation* from any such Declarations; but however, the Christian Religion is intirely free from any such absurd Methods of propagating its Truths. It supposes that Men must *believe*, not *profess only* to believe, in God, that *He is*, &c. and it requires the Worship of God to be in *Spirit and Truth*, not restrained to Place or Profession; and it lays Men's *Condemnation* not on their *Errors*, but on their *Vices*; and it requires their *Love of the Truth* and their *doing Truth*, in opposition

to their believing a Lye; or having Pleasure in Unrighteousness. Indeed the Christian Revelation certainly was, and I think now is, attended with such plain Evidences of its Truth and Excellency; that those who fairly have the Arguments laid before them in their just and natural Force, cannot sincerely attend to the Truths of it and reject it: However their *Dishonesty* and *Insincerity* alone can condemn them in so doing; and no doubt did in the first and purest Ages. And herein is laid their Guilt and *Condemnation* in these sacred Writings, that they loved Darkness and Error, because their Deeds were evil, and did not believe, even because Jesus told them the Truth, &c. Therefore, whosoever believed should be saved; and whosoever believed not should be condemned. This I can easily imagin might be a just Conclusion and Rule of Judgment, when Christianity was first offered to the World: And if the Rule is not now the same, or the Conclusion is weaken'd; it may be partly owing to some Decrease of Evidence (tho' there is also some Evidence much strengthen'd

en'd by Time;) but is, I fear, vastly more to be attributed (not to the bad *Lives* of its Professors, which can never *condemn*, but are *condemned* by the Truth, but) to *Corruption* and *Disguise* of its *true* and *genuine Principles*, by subtil and bold Assertions, falsely presumed to be taught by it; and which is yet worse, impudently imposed by human Force and Cruelty on all who assent to its Truths in general, and would partake of the common Advantages of it. But these Considerations would lead me from my present Design.

Thus Sir, you see my plain and undisguised Notion of *Sincerity*, in which I have been the more *open* and *free*, that it might appear I am not cavilling, or contending for *Victory*, but for *Truth* only: And I have hereby greatly prevented my self in those particular Observations which I intended on what you have advanced. Nevertheless, I will not omit any thing that seems of weight. I have no Inclination to find fault, but am really concerned to see this great Principle of all moral Virtue treated with such Scorn and Contempt.

tempt. That which gives me most Offence is contained in the Pages 155—170. Your first Slight seems to be shewn by calling it in high Authority, This so sovereign a Preservative. I submit indeed to the Importance of it, which you seem to doubt, that if it should fail, there is nothing then left to depend on. Nothing in us, as you must mean. What else or better you may have to depend on, we must take to be your strict Orthodoxy and Assurance of being in the right; which last, every honest tho' mistaken, Man has at least equal Evidence of: Unless your Evidence alone is to determin not only for your self, but for others, as you seem to think^b. You justly distinguish Sincerity as opposed to Hypocrisy, or to Prejudice and Partiality^c, the latter you have strongly supposed to be ever wanting when we differ from you or Truth; but you have forgot to insist upon it, when we are so happy as to be of your Opinion, or in the right; thereby supposing that it matters not whether a Man be sincere, i. e. without Preju-

^a p. 155. ^b p. 160. ^c p. 156. ^d V dice
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dice or *Partiality* or no; if he do but profess the *Truth*, or think as you do: And here you have lost a most glorious Field of Triumph for the *Orthodox*, those *faithful* and *steady* Believers in all received and established Articles of Faith; who bravely stand their Ground, not *against* their worldly Interests of Reputation and Preferment, but in *Conformity* to them all. Most infallible Proofs of *Impartiality*! and strong *Evidences* of *Truth*!

I think at last you must be forced to allow, what I perceive you are quite averse to, that *Sincerity* as opposed to *Hypocrisy*, will not only *excuse* but *justify* an Action, while the Mistake continues: And for this plain Reason, because to act contrary to one's Persuasion, is on all Hands allowed to be *immoral*. Your being able to shew that they are *mistaken*, altho' by means of their prior Guilt, alters not the Case, while they really continue *mistaken*. If you can show that Men ever did or do *Murder*, taking it to be their *Duty*²; and not really aiming at *worldly Interests* and

Honours, and Lusts of the Flesh against their Reason, I see not but you will justify them. And I find you take St. Paul only to have offended by persecuting the Truth, the Church of God^a. He was right, say you, in his general Principle, i. e. Persecution, but wrong in the Application, i. e. to the true Church^b. Whereas I ever thought his Guilt lay in his Cruelty and Persecution. I am sure all Persecution may equally be defended on your Principles: For Men generally think, and always pretend to think, that those they persecute are in Error. In what Sense St. Paul says he was injurious and a Persecutor, and therefore a great Sinner; and yet that he had lived in all good Conscience, I leave you to make out; tho' I do not like your Scheme^c. But I hope you will not be obliged either to defend Persecution, or to condemn Sincerity. It is very easy to give bad Names to Persons and Principles, and you may possibly fancy them very proper to introduce all that Contempt, Ill-

will, Abuse and Hatred, which you call *Excommunication*, and think due to these who, you say, are *Impugners of divine Truth, Subverters of Souls, &c.* whom at the same time you allow to be *sincere and honest* in what they do and teach^a. But you have need of all your *Affurance* to support you in this Condemnation of those whom Reason *acquits*, and God *accepts*, in these very Instances. Who they are that at last may be found to *believe a Lie*, may be worth your serious Consideration; since they are such as *have Pleasure*, not in *Sincerity*, but in *Unrighteousness*. Surely there is some *Unrighteousness*, and *Uncharitablenes* too, in your cruel Condemnation of those who may endeavour to propagate *Deism*, and charging them with *pretended Sincerity*; by which too they become *false Instances* to your Purpose^b. What can you mean by the *Guilt of renouncing their Baptism*? Is it possible you can think, or do you only insinuate, that Men are obliged, on pain of Damnation to believe

^a p. 166.

^b p. 158.

*always what they may before have honestly professed to believe; or perhaps only what another may have vowed that they should believe? You should surely be a little more careful in fixing the Charge of a *feared Conscience and a reprobate Mind.**

Concerning *Sincerity* as opposed to *Prejudice* and *Partiality*, you have advanced some very extraordinary Notions. They are mostly, I think, obviated already, by what I have said. Yet you must excuse my pointing at some very particular Mistakes. One is, that you suppose a very long Proof of *Sincerity* is necessary to justify a Man in differing from you: Nay you think this Proof impossible ^a. No *Prepossession, no Bias, no leaning to a side, all due Diligence, no Haste nor Sloth, no Impatience; all proper Care and Exactness in comparing and ballancing Reasons:* In short he must be *perfectly sincere*. All this is very well: But why not as necessary when he thinks *with you?* or, as you

call it, submits to Reason? I should be glad to see your Care and Concern were equal for the Sincerity of Believers, the Orthodox, the true Church, the Professors of important Doctrines: Their Sincerity is surely as necessary: or will, being in the right without it, think you, secure them?

Another great Mistake seems to be, that a Man cannot know that he is sincere, in this last Sense of Impartiality: Whereas I think, I have shown, that I can as easily know, by consulting my own Heart, whether *I love the Truth*, and am willing to receive it upon its Evidence, as I know whether *I do what I see my Obligation to do*. In neither Case indeed do I know whether I am in the right, i. e. whether a wiser Being than I would see the same Truths and Obligation that I do: But this I'm sure of, whatever moral Agent sees the Truth and Obligation as I do, and in my Circumstances, stands obliged in the same manner. And we do equally know our own Sincerity, whether our Capacities are greater or less. All this has been made out before.

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But you seem to think there is no Proof of Sincerity but being in the right; and no Evidence of being in the right but agreeing with you². How ludicrous does it appear in you to say, *Show me thy Sincerity without thy* (you should have said my) *Reasons, and I will shew thee my Sincerity by my Reasons?* You ingeniously add, that a Man's being sincerely a Sinner, does not make him a Saint. As if you really did not see the Abuse of Words in thus talking of a sincere Sinner. Why not an *insincere Saint?* which is also very common, meaning a wicked Man of right orthodox Opinions. But all this is truly a mean and unworthy Deceit of Words. How can you hope to believe the Truth, who are capable of such Degrees of Partiality?

In short, the whole Truth is this. If the Question be, *Who believes right?* Sincerity is out of the Case, and the Evidence alone must determine: But this is of no moral Importance, as plainly appears: And no man has herein a Right to deter-

mine for another ; much less can one Man take upon him to condemn or abuse another on this account. If the Question be, *What will justify a Man before God in any Opinion?* The Answer is, his Sincerity and Integrity in the Love of Truth, whatever are his right or mistaken Opinions.

And now what Authority you may have for all your *Censures, Condemnations and Cruelties*^a, which you say you are obliged to practise by your *Christian Principles*, I do not enquire, nor indeed care ; while our civil Liberties are maintained, which will effectually secure us from all *real hurt*. Let those who think they must submit shift for themselves.

These, I apprehend, your main Mistakes. But you have here and there drop'd some Notions of a like kind, as, that *Religion is not a personal Thing*^b, which is very strange, unless you mean a publick or established Religion. You seem to think, that *Sinners are condemned*

^a p. 169. ^b p. 113.

by their general Principles only*. Now I think they are necessarily condemned in every instance of Sin; and this way only can Heresy be Guilt. You say, ^b Ask whether one that commits Fornication, or one that teaches and inculcates it as lawful Practice, is the wickeder Man? Such an one you, upon your Principles, odly call an Heretick. Again, as to Faith, Ask, say you, Whether a Man that perverts any material Article, or that takes upon him to teach and inculcate the erroneous Doctrine to others, is the wickeder Man? Here you sadly misrepresent the Case. There is a great Difference between teaching the Lawfulness of what others think immoral, and teaching Immorality: And the same in any Instances of Faith. Opposing the Truth you see, and that which others say they see, is quite a different thing. What you assert ^c, That we are not commanded merely to obey our Persuasions, tho' we ought not to go against them, seems to be a Contradiction in Terms. One must be right,

^a p. 120. ^b p. 145. ^c p. 189.

the other wrong. You add, *That our Sincerity cannot support us, for of that we know nothing.* Alas! what then shall support us! and what is it we can know!

There are many more Expressions and Insinuations up and down in your Book, founded, as I think, on the same Mistakes, and tending to the same bad Conclusions, of taking off Mens Thoughts and Dependence from that *Integrity*, which alone is in their own *Powers*, and which alone can possibly recommend them to the Favour of God. It is not my Design or Desire to aggravate or expose any thing you have said, and therefore I pass by all that lies not directly in my way. There is one Passage however so remarkable^a, that I cannot omit taking notice of it. You allow, that *Men of as great Sense and Learning, and Piety, as any in their Times have fallen into Heresy.* Indeed you very boldly and uncharitably add, *to all outward Appearance.* Pray, of what nature

and kind must that *Heresy* be? *Sincerity* you often allow them, and indeed it would only be Folly to deny them that which they have at least an equal Claim to with your self: Now they have also *Sense*, *Learning* and *Piety*: It would seem a fair Conclusion; that they are as *honest Men*, and as likely too to be in the *right*, as the *Orthodox* themselves! But you say, *There is no Sense in going against Truth*, i.e. your Opinion; *no Learning in contradicting the Wisdom of God*, i.e. your Opinion; *no Piety in departing from God*; i.e. your Opinion again. Is this fair Representation and just Reasoning? How long may a Man declaim in this manner? I know not what *Peace* and *Security* of Mind you may enjoy with your Principles. Your vain Assurance of being in the *right*, your loose and uncertain Notion of Fundamentals, your Submission to the Authority of the Church, your Security in believing certain important Doctrines, not indeed *without*, but *separate from Sincerity*, seem to afford but a slender Satisfaction. I hope you do not propose to us

us a way to Happiness *in believing*, which you your self neither see nor feel to be effectual. Give me leave to wish you however that Ingredient to your Joy of Heart, which you have so throughly contemned and abused; that *Integrity* which I am persuaded is at least as *important* a Disposition as the best *Belief*; and that only, if I mistake not, which can be of any Avail in the sight of God.

I own my self very highly offended by what you have thus advanced about *Sincerity*: Yet I am not sensible that I have been guilty of any the least want of Respect towards you in what I have said; but have faithfully enquir'd after, and declared the *Truth* only, as it appears to me, and that without Disguise or Affectation of any Evidence, but what seemed convincing to my self. If therefore any thing here said may be thought worth your notice, let it be treated with the same Regard. I shall weigh no Evidence but that of *common Sense and Reason*: I disclaim all Authority in Proof of *Truth*; even that of *Scripture* it self,

till the particular Inspiration and Meaning of it is mutually agreed upon. Above all, I utterly reject and despise all *Censure* and *Threats* of any kind ; hard Names and opprobrious Language ; in short every thing but the plain and open Evidence of *Truth*.

Before I conclude, give me leave to set before you the *Nature* of the Cause you are engaged in. I will suppose all that you can wish or desire, however contrary to all Appearance ; I will suppose that you are defending *Truth*; that the best Christians, and the Opinions of the whole Christian Church are on your *Side*, and that the *Doctrines* you are pleading for are the most *important*. Yet after all, what Methods are you taking to propagate these *Principles*? You are not building them upon the Evidence of *Truth* but *Authority*; and so you rob them of all their *real* Advantage over Error; you are supporting them by *Cruelty*, *Persecution*, and uncharitable *Church Censures*, upon the Destruction of all the *Peace* and *Good-will* of human Society; and above all, you are exalting them

them upon the Ruins of *Sincerity* and *Integrity*, and that Security of the Mind, which is the *Glory* and Dependence of every rational Being. Now, could you be victorious in such a Cause, how sad and melancholy ought your Triumph to be! and how little can *these Truths* themselves repair the Loss of all that is *good* and *valuable* among Men! I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

